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The problem of the unemployed

London

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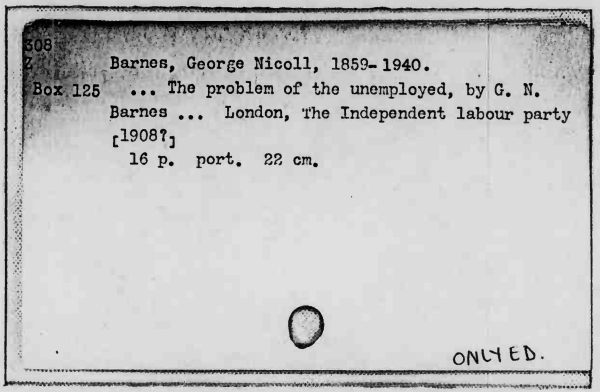
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THE PROBLEM OF THE UNEMPLOYED.

By G. N. BARNES, M.P.

PUBLISHED BY THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY,
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THE . . . UNEMPLOYED PROBLEM . . . .

By
G. N. BARNES.

"Midas longed for gold, and insulted the Olympians. He got gold so that whatsoever he touched became gold—and he with his long ears was little the better for it."

"Such a platitude of a world, in which all working horses could be well fed and innumerable workingmen should die starved."—CARLYLE.

UNEMPLOYMENT is the persistent and dominant fact in modern industrialism. It lies at the root of all social and industrial ills, both in their economic and social or human aspect. It colours the workman's life and thought and conduct, it weakens his union, it haunts all who love their kind, and who see in it a bar to progress on any line of social amelioration. How to cure it is the whole social problem; to abate it is sufficient to fire the enthusiasm of all real reformers.

It is, in its financial aspect, of special importance to Trade Unionists. Trade Unions spend hundreds of thousands of pounds every year in the relief of the unemployed, and it is questionable if this immense expenditure does one atom of good by way of solution of the problem, while there is no doubt as to its weakening effects. Trade Unions spend in this, and like manner, moneys which, if only applied to educational propaganda on the cause and cure of unemployment, would almost effect a peaceful revolution. Trade Unions, by raising wages and thereby increasing spending power of Labour, have certainly contributed somewhat, and more or less unconsciously, to lessening unemployment, and the evil has also to some extent been staved off by expansion of markets, improved means of transit, flunkeyism, and other causes, but it is now upon us in all its horrors. There are at the best of times half-a-million of men for whose labour there is no demand, and the numbers of these increase in times of depression to a million or more.

In the pages here following I contribute a few thoughts on the question in the hope that they may be useful.

THE CAUSES OF UNEMPLOYMENT.

The original, and still main, underlying cause of unemployment is the private monopoly of land. Land is the primary source of employment; and access to it having been barred to would-be users by the parasitic and idle few who own it, unemployment has naturally resulted, and has been perpetuated and increased by

profit-making methods of industry, goods not being produced for the use and enjoyment of the people, but primarily for profit, and in such a way as to cause fluctuations and displacements. Capitalism has supervened upon landlordism, and has turned out to be the greater curse of the two because more impersonal, more omniverous, and more remorseless.

Capital gets reproduced and increased from Labour, the burden of it gets greater all the time (although the rate of interest may be less), and the flow of production becomes checked by lack of demand for goods sufficient to keep things going. The mass of the people having been robbed of an increasing share of their earnings cannot provide the necessary demand—cannot buy goods although in need of them—and at the same time feed the monster which lives and grows upon them.

It will thus be seen that Labour is enveloped in a very devil's chain of circumstance, its increased power to produce goods on the large scale—by scientific methods and a dense population—having been turned into an instrument for its undoing.

Agriculture. Agricultural industry in this country is not organised at all, but has been allowed to wither, and in the withering process it has dragged down with it all the small industries of the villages. Agriculture, even in the best circumstances, would have given employment to a relatively diminishing proportion of people, because in a wealthy community food production is a diminishing part of the industrial activities of the people, and in any case machinery and specialisation would have the same effect in that as in other industries. But the depletion of the villages is not so much from those causes as from the fact that agriculture has been depressed by insecurity of tenure at fair rents and absence of co-operative effort. It is mainly from these twin sources that we get the stream of immigration from the country to the town, the consequent intensifying of competition of town life, and the impoverishment of large masses of the people.

Manufactures. Unemployment in manufacturing centres is different in kind to that of, say, 100 years ago. Employment was then sometimes open to all who cared to work, now it never is. The organisation of modern manufacturing industry throws off large masses of men who are not fitted under existing conditions to take any specific part in the industry of the country, and these add to the unemployed. It is no answer to say that these are trained for new duties or absorbed in the ranks of unskilled workers. This is only partially true, and even if it were wholly true it does not meet the point, because while one is absorbed other two are thrown in the market. The result is the more steady employment of some in our staple industries, but less employment of others who have not got fixed, so to speak, in any particular niche in the industrial machine. When looking at the figures of Trade Unions, for instance, it will be found that unemployment is less with each succeeding depression of trade, but these figures (which, by the bye, are the only figures available) do not indicate the facts at all, because they take no account of those who are left stranded by industrial changes and who are unorganised and untrained.

The foregoing appear to me to be the chief causes of unemployment. Subsidiary causes include foreign wars and loans, financial speculation, and bloated armaments (all or any of which may lead to diminished purchasing power of ourselves or our customers), private ownership of railways and other monopolies, as well as absence of proper training, commercial as well as industrial.

QUACKERY.

Wages. I now come to the spurious proposals which have been made regarding the evil, and that which is entitled to first place by virtue of time-worn repetition is the proposal to lower wages in order to decrease cost of production. We are often told that if people would work for less wages, we would thereby be able to compete on more favourable terms and be able to put goods in the market at cheaper rates.

It is a quaint idea. We are to get more trade and employment by impoverishing ourselves. With whom we compete is a matter which appears to have had but little consideration given to it by those who talk in that way, but, presumably, they mean that British industry would be better able to compete with the foreigner. I regard it not only as mere quackery, calculated to do no good, but, on the contrary, bound, if carried out, to do harm.

It is perfectly true that, so long as attention is directed to any one industry, cheaper production, by lower wages or otherwise, may give that industry an advantage and lead to its expansion. But in foreign, as in all, trade goods are paid for by goods, and, therefore, if more of any particular kind is exported it stands to reason that less of other kinds will be exported. The goods of the particular industry which cheapens production by low wages may for a time be more in demand, but, correspondingly, demand will be less for goods of other kinds which had previously been exported. On the whole, therefore, we should remain as we were, so far as affected in that way.

But another element enters, and that is the lessening of demand for commodities on the part of those whose wages had been lessened, and to that extent employment on the whole would be also lessened. If engineers' wages, for instance, were reduced, engineers would for a time be better able to compete in the markets of the world; but, inasmuch as engineers spend their wages in buying boots, shoes, clothing, and food, the producers of these things would find themselves less employed, not only by the lessened demand for their goods from abroad, but by the lessened demand for them at home. And it may here also be said that home trade implies employment at each side of the bargain, while foreign trade gives employment at but one side so far as we are concerned, the employment set up in repayment being to the foreigner.

To reduce our wages, therefore, is literally to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs.

Efficiency. The next idea is that of increased efficiency of labour. It is sometimes said that men are unemployed because they are drunkards, or lazy, or otherwise inefficient. It may be admitted that the unemployed are the least efficient, generally speaking, but this fact has little bearing upon the matter. The essential fact in the situation is that the demand for labour is satisfied, and that being so, it matters but little whether those forming the surplus are efficient or otherwise, although, as has been admitted, the number of untrained men is constantly increasing, and must necessarily increase with increasing rapidity of change in productive methods.

It is of little avail, however, to train them, or improve them in any way (so far as contributing to a solution of unemployment), unless, at the same time, work is provided for them. Otherwise, economically considered, increased efficiency of labour would have the same effect as increased productive power by improved machinery or more scientific knowledge; that is to say, it would increase the productive power of the nation, but might at the same time add to the burdens of the wealth producers of the nation, as previous increases in productive power have already added to them. Increase in wealth-producing capacity of a nation is of benefit to the people of that nation (and will contribute to employment) only in so far as it increases their power of consumption and demand for commodities.

What is needed is to develop a demand from those twelve millions of our folk who are, according to the Prime Minister, submerged in poverty, and therefore badly housed, ill-clad, and underfed. This is infinitely more important than all the schemes for foreign markets which have ever been hatched.

Population. Emigration is another nostrum that has been put forward from time to time as a remedy for unemployment, and is just as futile as the other capitalist suggestions which have already been dealt with, and for the same reasons. Emigration deprives the country, as a rule, and in a potential sense, of its best customers. The people who are apparently surplus want clothing and housing and feeding, and, if only set to useful work, would set up a demand for these necessaries of life, and thereby lessen the unemployment evil. If emigration were a remedy for unemployment Ireland would be the most prosperous country in the world, inasmuch as half of its population has left it during the last 50 years, but to-day Ireland stands, as ever, the most poverty-stricken part of the United Kingdom.

Tariffs. The latest outcome of muddle-headedness is Tariff Reform. This is simply the latest garb for the obscurantist nonsense which has been for a long time a sort of forlorn hope of disgruntled Tory politicians and newspaper editors of the yellow order, the only difference being that Imperialism has now been hitched on to it to make it more attractive. As I understand it, the proposal is that we should tax goods imported from foreign countries, but which could be produced in the Colonies. That is to say, that we should make tariff war on

our best customers (at home as well as abroad) in order to enable the Colonials to wax fat and grow rich at our expense by charging higher prices for corn, wool, and other raw material. The futility of the thing is apparent in the mere statement of it, and that such a proposal should be put forward and defended by responsible and representative public men is a proof of the straits to which politicians have had to resort in order to explain a condition of things which belies some of the predictions alike of Protectionist and Free Trader and which is in direct contradiction to orthodox economic theories.

Free Trade has been an immense success in so far as wealth production is concerned. By enabling us to buy anywhere it has led to the application of our resources in those channels which have yielded the largest material results. Wealth abounds beyond the dreams of the most avaricious of 60 years ago. This, however, is of little avail so long as the mass of the people share in it only in a manner conditioned by a competitive struggle for work which is hardened and embittered by the fact that some of them are a useless surplusage cut out from a place at the feast altogether.

It was predicted by Free Traders that, not only would Free Trade increase wealth, but that this wealth would automatically get diffused in higher wages among the mass of the people. Hence, those who have directed wealth production have concerned themselves but little with the human interests involved, having been led to believe that such was unnecessary. Each man, it was said, was the best custodian of his own interests, and the highest political wisdom of the early Free Trader was expressed in the convenient doctrine of letting people alone for the devil to take the hindmost. Of course, Trade Unionism, factory legislation, and all the other measures of control and regulation which have been forced into existence by demands arising from the truer instincts of the people, and the growing social consciousness of the community, are utterly at variance with this doctrine of *laissez faire*, but as yet many Free Traders can be induced to let go their old-fashioned notions only by the stern logic of necessity.

And this is where the Tariff Reformer quack gets his chance. He can see that the predictions of the early Free Traders have been falsified in the results so far as wealth distribution is concerned, however successful Free Trade may have been as a condition favourable to wealth production. But his proposals would not touch the root of the evil of unemployment. He does not propose to protect the people against the landlord and capitalist, but only to protect a few manufacturers at home against an imaginary foe abroad; he does not propose to cheapen land, but to make it dearer, nor to increase wages, but rather to make them less by increasing the prices of the commodities of everyday consumption which wages procure.

Tariff Reform is a delusion and a snare. In addition to the ill-results already mentioned it would leave the ill-effects of *laissez faire* untouched and bring other evils in its train. It would diminish the productive power of the nation by limiting the field of supply of goods; it would involve us in political friction with foreign nations and embroil our politicians in interminable squabbles about tariffs, whereas they should

be engaged in real questions of social and industrial reconstruction. And, whatever it might do for special interests, it could not possibly do anything by way of lessening unemployment as a whole.

It is quite unnecessary to argue the matter in detail, since the condition of tariff countries is a warning to us against travelling that way. America has in operation all, and more than all, which is sought by Tariff Reformers in this country, and unemployment is there as bad, or worse, than with us.

Tariff Reform, however, can be tested by the logic of fact in another way—by the way the Tariff Reformers chose for themselves when launching their proposals a few years ago.

Tariffs and preference were, according to the promise, to increase the demand from Colonials for our manufactured goods to such an extent as to afford full employment for everyone. Well, it so happens that, since this prediction of the new Protectionist, the demand from abroad for our manufactures has come to us without preferential tariffs. The Board of Trade Returns for 1907 show increased exports of manufactures amounting to no less than 37 million sterling for the year as compared with ten years earlier, and, at the very time these figures are published, the army of unemployed is more numerous than at any time since 1894.

An even more striking illustration of the uselessness of foreign markets as a remedy for unemployment is afforded by the figures of the engineering trade.

In 1901—which was, I think, the year of the launching of Tariff Reform—the value of engineering exports was £17,855,362, and in the year just closed engineering products were exported of a value amounting to £31,763,524; yet in December, 1907, there were 4,170 members of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers unemployed, as compared with 3,082 in December, 1901.

The truth is that neither Free Trade nor Protection is any remedy for unemployment. Free Trade is the policy best adapted to lead to national productivity and international goodwill, and the policy, therefore, which Labour ought to support, and no doubt will support. What is needed is a better distribution of the benefits of Free Trade, and this will not be obtained by tariff tinkering, but by legislative enactments of quite a different order, as well as by Trade Union and co-operative effort generally.

PALLIATIVES.

Having now somewhat cleared the ground of the vagaries due to ignorance or perversity or self-interest, let us consider what can really be done to abate the evil.

There is, in point of fact, no single panacea for the evils involved in unemployment short of Socialism, and if a person professes to have such a panacea it would be well to regard him with caution. It may safely be assumed that he has not looked on all sides of the question, or that he is a mere echo of some practical (?) politician. In nine cases out of ten probably both assumptions would be right.

The main source of relief is, I should say, the land—both urban and rural, but especially the latter. The area in use and under cultivation must be increased. Since the introduction of Free Trade the number of people tilling the soil has decreased by one million, the number now so engaged is but as one to fourteen, as compared with one to three in Germany and one to two in France, and the area now actually in tillage in this country is but 13 million acres out of a total cultivatable area of 60 million acres.

And, worse still, we are no longer the workshop of the world. Other countries have progressed in the manufacturing arts, so that we find it increasingly difficult to find markets for our goods to pay for imported foodstuffs. We must provide our own by re-peopling the soil.

I should say, then, that the touchstone by which any proposal dealing with the unemployed should be judged is as to how far it is calculated to bring in working contact our workless people with our wasted natural opportunities, or how far it is calculated to stimulate a demand for our products—not so much from people abroad, whether Colonial or foreign—but from our own kith and kin at home. Trade Unions, by raising wages, are already agencies working in the directions indicated—a fact which has not yet obtained that recognition which is its due. What is wanted is action on a larger scale but having the same result.

I roughly divide such action under two headings, namely, measures of social reform which would leave the individual to take advantage of them in his own way while living his own life, and second, direct collective organisation and control of labour employed in works of public utility, or as may be decided upon. The first would include the taxing of ground values, improvements in agricultural land tenure, and shortening of hours of labour. The second would embrace proposals for the arming of public authorities with power to levy rates or taxes for schemes of employment and the setting up of new Government machinery, local and central, to deal directly with surplus labour.

Land Values.

Let us consider these proposals in the order named. First, taxation of ground values. This requires a new standard of value for rating and taxing purposes. The proposal is that, having separated the land from other values, land values should then be separately assessed and made to contribute to public revenue. There are those who regard the proposal, in its most drastic application, as a solution of the whole unemployment problem, but I merely take it as a means of making land cheaper and therefore easier of access. It would, I believe, be very helpful.

In or about all our urban centres of population to-day there is a good deal of unoccupied land, and a good deal which is not used to its full capacity. This arises from the fact that unoccupied land goes practically scotfree of rates or taxes, and even that which is covered yields revenue only according to use made of it for the time being, instead of, as it ought to, according to the value accruing to it by virtue of the presence, the needs, and the industry of the

people. Even covered land, if covered by unoccupied buildings, is relieved of public burdens, as if of set purpose to aggravate housing and other difficulties of crowded areas. Fifteen thousand houses in the City of Glasgow, for instance, are said to be empty, while a quarter of the population are huddled in one-roomed tenements and house rents maintained at a rate higher than they would be if these houses were tenanted and people better housed. By altering the incidence of taxation—by putting the rates or taxes, or both, upon the land value, irrespective of use made of it—more land and buildings would be brought into use, inasmuch as it would be a costly proceeding on the part of a landlord to contribute to public revenue without getting an adequate return for it.

Rent would thus be lessened, the purchasing power of wages increased and unemployed diminished by labour being employed on unoccupied land, a stimulus being for the time being given to industry generally.

It is sometimes said that the landlord would turn the burden over on to the tenant, but he could not do so, at all events, in those cases where he had no tenant, and it is in those cases where most injury ensues; it is in that aspect that the proposal bears most upon unemployment.[1]

Neither could he, for the time being, in any case put the burden on the tenant, inasmuch as the operation of the law of supply and demand would be tilted rather against the landlord than in his favour by virtue of the fact that the supply of land (now artificially limited by some of it being kept out of use) would be increased, and the landlord would, therefore, not only find himself unable to charge more rent, but would be prevented from charging as much. He charges at present, speaking generally, all he can get, and there is nothing immediately incidental to the changed conditions following the imposition of the burden to enable him to get more—rather the reverse.

Colonies at Home.

The main point, however, is, as has been said, the bettering of the condition of the cultivator of the soil and the fuller use of rural land for productive purposes. To achieve these objects it is necessary not only to tax but to insist upon proper cultivation. The lever of taxation may bring land in use to its full economic value, but sometimes its economic value does not harmonise with what might be called its human value. Landlords may get as much rent for sheep runs or sporting preserves as for land under arable cultivation, and probably save themselves much trouble thereby. But in certain cases their gain is the nation's loss, and in these the nation must assert its right to determine what use shall be made of the land. Land has too long been regarded as the plaything of the rich, instead of, as it ought to be, the mainstay of the people. Too long have we been dependent upon foreign food supply—with all the international complications and dangers to which that dependence subjects us—instead of growing our food within our own borders. According to the most competent authorities it can be done; employment can thereby be given and a home market substituted for foreign demand for manufactures.

Instead of which agriculture gets depressed owing to the conditions already stated. Leases have tended to get shorter, rents have been fixed by hard need of occupiers, sporting rights have been maintained, and farmers' discretion curtailed by arbitrary landlords. The consequence is that farmers have been lacking in initiative, have failed to adopt co-operative methods of collection and sale, and, after having their little capital gradually eaten up, have had to give up the hopeless struggle and betake themselves to other occupations.

At the best the agricultural labourer's wage has been small and housing accommodation bad. He has been dependent on the farmer and subject to territorial, clerical, and other influences of an untoward nature, and it is little wonder, therefore, that the glitter of the town has attracted him. In short, the depletion of the country districts is due to a combination of circumstances, partly economic, partly social, and partly human. But the main cause, and that which the community can best deal with first, is the relationship of landlord and tenant.

The Bills recently passed for England give to the small farmer more security of tenure and more discretion as to crops, and they also aim at enabling the labourers to get holdings of their own direct from the public authorities. By these means something may be done in the way of re-peopling of the south countryside. But their weakness is that their operation depends too much upon the County Councils, which bodies are dominated by landlords, and they make but little provision for helping the labourer to take advantage of them.

The Scotch Small Landholders' Bill, although perhaps not so good from the theoretical point of view, inasmuch as it makes no provision for public ownership of land, yet is, I think, a better Bill, because more compulsory in its provisions. It fixes rents by a public authority; it also arms commissioners with powers (and £65,000 per year to exercise them) to deal with, and prepare, land for small holdings and to fix the conditions upon which rents should be paid to the landlords, securing for the tenant fixity of tenure and the results of his own improvements, and thereby leaving him safe to exercise his discretion and skill free from fear of higher rent, and it lays upon these commissioners the duty of promoting and developing agricultural organisation and co-operation. The Bill, it will thus be seen, tends, within the limits of the money granted for the purpose, towards improving the conditions appertaining to Scotch agricultural life, and no doubt it was because of that fact that the House of Lords treated it in such a cavalier manner. For my part I hope it will be passed without landlord alteration and during the present session of Parliament, as well as the Valuation Bill for Scotland which was also rejected, and which was a necessary first step in the direction of taxing land values.

Hours of Labour.

The reduction of the hours of labour is of most importance as a means of getting breathing time for many whose lives are an incessant grind on the iron wheel of necessity—subject to a tyranny arising out of economic dependence no less real than that under king or baron in bygone days. The carter does not wear a collar as an outward and

visible sign of servitude, as did Gurth the swineherd, but his condition is no better. In one respect it is not so good, because, whereas Cedric, the Saxon, might be a humane man, the modern Gurth may work for an intangible thing called a company or a trust without a body to be kicked or a soul to be damned. His twelve to sixteen hours of daily toil shuts him out from any share in the treasure and pleasure of life, and is a disgrace to those who oppose legislative protection on the false plea of individual liberty. It is in that aspect that I should like to deal with the shortening of hours. But I refrain.

The reduction of hours, however, would lessen the unemployed. There are many monopolies which employ large numbers of men, and I would begin with these, because reduction could take place without causing any great disturbance other than the necessary readjustment of the staffs. The railways, for instance, employ about half a-million men and boys, and the reduction of hours on railways would probably mean the employment of a great many men and increased spending capacity for the railway employés as a whole. Mines form another example. The number employed in, on, and about the mines is nearly a million, and, therefore, reduction of miners' working hours would absorb a great number of the unemployed men. The same could be said in regard to tramways and similar monopolies. Where these monopolies have been municipalised the hours have already been considerably reduced, and the process of municipalisation and further reduction of hours should, therefore, be encouraged. Legislation might also be invoked in aiding further reduction of hours in factories. Of course, there would be to some extent increased individual efficiency so that increased demand for labour would not correspond with decrease of hours, but that there would be an increased demand for labour is certain, and that is sufficient for my purpose.

Opponents will, of course, predict ruin to those concerned; they will say that prices will be raised and that capital will be frightened to other countries, but it is sufficient to point out that they have always said these things and they have always been wrong, as events have proved. The first Factory Act of 1802 was opposed on exactly the same grounds as also has every one since: every one has brought with it increased intelligence as well as improved conditions, and has been a benefit not only to factory operatives, but even to factory owners and to the whole community.

These are a few of the best methods of relief on what might be called individualistic lines, and towards which, I think, by whomsoever brought forward, the friends of Labour should look with a favourable eye. But, after all, they leave the means of production of wealth and the mechanism of distributing it just as now, subject to fluctuation and depression. Moreover, they are indirect, and would be somewhat slow in their operation so far as effecting any appreciable diminution in the unemployed army.

THE ORGANISATION OF LABOUR.

The Labour Party has decided on a frontal attack. It has become responsible for a Bill (which by the fortune of the ballot and the kindness of Mr. P. W. Wilson, M.P., stands in the name of that gentleman) which demands the right to work. It, in effect, says that the workless man has been deprived by the community of his natural and social rights, and is entitled to an equivalent, suitable and appropriate to his immediate needs.

Land has been given to the few to the exclusion of the many, and capital applied to profit instead of use. And while production of wealth has become social and collective, and therefore more effective in its methods, the individual unit in the community who is without land or capital has been shut out from a share in the benefits accruing therefrom. This is the reason why millionaires abound at one end of the social scale and unemployed get multiplied at the other; why the owning classes who do no work have a surfeit of good things, while the working classes are tied down to bare animal existence, and some denied even that. For all this the community is responsible, and, therefore, pending a sensible and scientific readjustment of the means of distribution and exchange of commodities, the demand is made on behalf of the unemployed man that the community shall provide him either with work or honourable maintenance. Without that our much-vaunted political freedom and individual liberty are but as sounding brass and tinkling symbols signifying to him nothing but hollow mockery.

Such is the point of view of the Bill.

It demands that men and women shall be treated at least as well as the beast of burden by being assured of the means of living. Not a very high ideal surely for this twentieth century so-called civilisation, with all its knowledge and capacity, but from it much more may come, for, once achieved, the great mass of the people will, for the first time, be free to take a real part in the intellectual life of the nation.

Under the Bill the question of employment becomes one of the ordinary functions of Government and administration, just as education and sanitation are now. Public bodies are charged with the duty of providing work, or alternatively, maintenance, for all who need and claim; and it is done, I venture to say, with all necessary safeguards and in a manner so as to prevent abuse; that is to say, its provisions cover temporary work to tide over temporary difficulties of those thrown out of work by depression, and, on the other hand, drastic powers are given to deal, by power of detention if necessary, with those who have been submerged and demoralised by idleness.

The Bill. Clause 1 constitutes the Council of every town of over 20,000 population the local unemployment authority, and provides further that two or more of such Councils may co-operate together for carrying out the provisions of the Bill.

Clause 2 provides that such Councils, as well as the local authorities of areas with a smaller population, *shall* register the unemployed.

Clause 3 throws upon the local unemployed authority the responsibility of finding work or maintenance for every person registered.

Clause 4 provides for the setting up of a central unemployed authority to see to the due carrying out of the provisions of the Bill.

Clause 5 provides for the setting up of commissioners to act as ears and eyes to the authorities.

Clause 6 empowers the local authorities to set up special committees for the purpose of working the Act.

Clause 7 defines the duties of the local authorities.

Clauses 8 and 9 deal with finance, and the remaining clauses embody the necessary arming powers.

Let me now briefly go over the clauses.

Clause 1, it will be noted, recognises that, although the question is national, the local authority may be used as the most convenient administrative unit, but it authorises co-operation between them for the purpose of carrying out schemes of mutual benefit.

Clause 2 provides for registration, not in the haphazard and inefficient manner hitherto attempted, and which has brought registration into contempt, but lays it upon the local authorities as an obligatory duty.

Clause 3 is the complement of the preceding clause in that it lays down that work or maintenance shall be provided for those who claim by registration. The local authorities would by this clause not only be stimulated to devise schemes of new work, but would be obliged to apply the powers already in their hands to get work done which is long overdue. They would doubtless show a good deal more alacrity than hitherto in reducing the hours of their increasing armies of men on the tramway systems, electric, and other undertakings, as well as in using their powers to demolish slum areas, erect municipal dwellings, and reserve their work for slack times as far as possible. In fact, the obligation thrown upon them of finding work for the unemployed would lead to the discovery of considerable powers which remain unused because it appears to be nobody's business to put them into operation.

Clause 4 gives expression to the principle of national responsibility and control. Under it employment would become one of the matters for which a Minister and a Department (to be, I hope, in common with other Departments, subsequently put on a basis of democratic control) would be reponsible to Parliament. Organisation of labour would become in Parliament, as in Town Councils, one of the matters upon which reports would be made, discussion raised, and governments made to fall or rise. This central authority would not, however, be merely a Government Department, but would include representatives of Trade Unions and various Government Departments, and it would devise schemes for the provision of work, and co-ordinate the work of the local authorities.

Clause 5 provides the central authority with the necessary staff of servants, whose duty would be to report upon work being carried out, and to advise as to work which might be undertaken. These Commissioners would be in touch with local authorities as well as with the

central authority, and it would probably be largely on their repo that the central authority would be guided in allocation of cos local schemes in cases of exceptional unemployment in any dist They would, however, be central officials, and would be paid imperial taxation, and should have much to do in the way of t carrying out of the measure.

Clause 6 provides for the constitution of the local une authority special committee, and it proceeds on much the as the central. That is to say, it provides for co-optic committee. One fifth, it is laid down, are to be from th Unions, and provision is also made for the inclusion of persons experience in industrial or agricultural organisation, but the position chairman is retained for a member of the local unemployment authority—that is, the Town or other Council, as the case may be—so that he may act there as the spokesman of the committee.

Clause 7 defines and limits the powers of the local authorities. They are to have power to train such of the unemployed as are inefficient for ordinary capitalist conditions, on the principle that labour, which is not good enough for ordinary profit-making, may yet be used—and improved—under more favourable circumstances. At the same time the local unemployment authority is given powers of detention of the habitually lazy for a period of not more than six months, this being subject to committal from a court of summary jurisdiction, and accompanied by the power to compel such lazy persons to work for their maintenance. Power is also given to defray cost of removal of unemployed persons from places where there is no work to places where employment is available, but such is forbidden in cases of industrial dispute.

The two succeeding clauses are those which provide for the allocation of the cost. Briefly put, Clause 8 provides that the local authorities—either singly or in conjunction—shall suggest schemes of work for the areas within their jurisdiction, and when there is no exceptional distress and unemployment proved to exist in such areas shall, in the main, be called upon to defray the cost of them as well as in every case the cost of migration. On satisfying the Local Government Board of exceptional unemployment the central authority must defray the cost from the Imperial Exchequer, and is given at the same time powers of inspection and regulation.

Clause 9 provides for the central authorities to carry out schemes of national utility when the figures of unemployment exceed 4 per cent., or at any time at the discretion of the Local Government Board, these to be paid for by moneys voted by Parliament, and carried out in co-operation with other schemes of local authorities.

Clause 10 gives power to local and central authorities to provide, for workers, land, dwellings, tools, and other necessaries, such to be acquired without additional payment beyond market price.

Clause 11 retains all citizen rights to those who may come under the operation of the Bill, and the remaining clauses are the necessary provisions for matters of detail.

It will be seen that the Bill as a whole deals comprehensively with the question, and marks an epoch in legislative projects on the unemployed problem.

PAST AND PRESENT.

e Bill of the Tory Government of 1905, although a first step in irection of treating unemployment as a national disease, and, ore a Bill not to be spoken of too slightingly, yet treated the s temporary, although recurrent. Moreover, it provided inery and no money beyond that necessary for machinery, der this category it included farm colonies.

ur Party Bill regards the problem as fundamental and , and it lays boldly upon public authorities, without any ion or qualification, the duty of dealing with it in the only ssible, by the provision of work.

will be no answer to be told that profitable work cannot be and.

There are many projects which would not be profitable to individuals, and which could not be so because not realisable in the life of an individual, but which would be profitable to the State. Such are undertakings for afforestation, land reclamation and coast protection, and for the first time these would cease to be discussed as mere abstractions, but as simple practical proposals, the means and the agents having been set up for carrying them into effect. Again, there is imported every year into this country dairy produce to the value of some fifty million sterling, and it would be the duty of those responsible for the carrying out of the Act to devise ways and means whereby this could be raised within our own shores.

Finally, and above all, there is the clamant need for salving the human wreckage now being made around us every day by idleness, and this far outweighs any idea of material profit. Nothing can be less profitable to the nation than the waste of power and the loss of character and self-respect going on now among us unchecked.

I, therefore, conclude by asking support for the Bill as the best proposal yet made for dealing directly with a great national evil by applying to it the heart and the brain as well as the material resources of the nation.

FULL INFORMATION

concerning the Labour Party's proposals on the questions of Unemployment and Old Age Pensions may be gathered from the following Pamphlets:—

THE NEW UNEMPLOYED BILL OF THE LABOUR PARTY. By J. Ramsay Macdonald, M.P. Price 1d.

OLD AGE PENSIONS. By G. N. Barnes, M.P. Price 3d.

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